

Foundations for Early Literacy

-Gaye Tylka, CESA 4

As in so many areas, there are two schools of thought on how to support early literacy in young children today. One perspective, associated with Marie Clay, views literacy development as a process children begin very early in life. Adults model reading and writing in the context of daily activities, have frequent conversations with children, read to children daily, provide ready access to interesting reading and writing materials, and seize those “teachable moments” (e.g. “Yes,” that letter is a ‘B’ – just like in your name. Ball starts with a ‘B’, too!). In this model, these combined ‘emergent literacy’ experiences over time prepare children to become readers and writers.

The other perspective draws on scientifically-based reading research (SBRR). This approach identified the components of literacy acquisition that are highly correlated with reading success and continues to examine the evidence for what teaching strategies appear most successful. The SBRR model is a data-driven, systematic, adult-directed approach. Numerous early literacy kits are now available through the publishers of elementary level reading series.

The International Reading Association (IRA), in alignment with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), has recently supported a balanced approach; a position that promotes emergent literacy practices along with some systematic SBRR instruction.

One essential evidence-based strategy is described as “**shared reading**”. Simply reading a book to a child or group of children is NOT supported as an effective strategy! In a shared reading experience, both the child(ren) and the adult are active participants, asking/answering questions, making predictions (“what do you think will happen now?”), building vocabulary (“the cat was enormous – that means it was very, very big ...”), and commenting. An easy way to help parents use shared reading is to remember the acronym **C-A-R**:

1. **Comment** (and wait for a response)
2. **Ask questions** (open-ended are best; requiring more than a yes/no answer)
3. **Respond** and add a little more (“Yes, that is a kitty. It has yellow and brown stripes.”)

Shared reading, using a variety of books, can support **oral language and vocabulary development; phonological and phonemic awareness; alphabet knowledge** (ABCs, environmental print, print conventions – left to right, etc.); and **code-focused instruction** (developing strategies to read words and gain meaning from text) – all identified as critical to later reading competence.

Developmental writing is also a critical early experience. Children record their own ideas and experiences through drawings and scribbles. They learn that pictures can represent objects/people/events; that spoken words can be represented through drawings or printed words; that written words together form sentences; and ultimately, that we can communicate through reading and writing. Writing down words as a child dictates them, having the child assist you in writing a thank you note, posting ABCs on the table where the child writes, and creating multiple opportunities for the child to experiment with writing materials all support this important early skill.

While skills are important to later reading, the child’s attitude or disposition for literacy is equally important. Lesley Morrow suggests that the most important thing we can do for children is to “instill a desire to learn to read and write”. Adults unintentionally turn literacy experiences into negative experiences by expecting a child to sit and attend too long, punishing a child by removal from the group for disrupting story time, or expecting the child to perform writing exercises that are too challenging. Keeping the ‘just right’ balance for each child – challenging but achievable – is the key.



WISCONSIN EFFORTS

Selected resources for early literacy:

www.collaboratingpartners.com

WI Model Early Learning Standards – a great place to begin

www.readingrockets.org

Amazing literacy links and resources!

www.getreadytoread.org

For educators and parents - national initiative to build early literacy skills

<http://www.famlit.org/educators/free-resources> Click on *NELP Teacher Guide*

National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), What Works: An Introductory Teacher Guide for Early Language and Emergent Literacy Instruction, 2009

<http://www.readingrockets.org/webcasts/3001>


Webcast on writing development – Susan B. Neumann, 12 min.

*Pierce, P.L., et.al. The Bridge: An Authentic Literacy Assessment Strategy for Individualizing and Informing Practice with Young Children with Disabilities, *Young Exceptional Children*, Division for Early Childhood, June 2009, p. 2-31

References:

International Reading Association (IRA), How Children Learn to Read and Write, 2009, p.1-16

<http://www.reading.org/Publish.aspx?page=bk700-1-Vukelich.pdf&mode=retrieve&D=10.1598/9780872077003.1&F=bk700-1-Vukelich.pdf&key=CA32BBE6-DE97-4322-B2BA-DF15896F903E>

National Institute for Literacy, Report of the National Early Literacy Panel, Developing Early Literacy: A Scientific Synthesis of Early Literacy Development and Implications for Intervention, 2008. <http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/publications/pdf/NELPReport09.pdf> 

"Bite" of Research "There is a strong relationship between children's learning and how often their parents have interactive conversations with them."

(Hart & Risley, 1995; Snow, et al., 1998)

